

## **Department of Information and Innovation Meritorious Awards Policy**

Applicable To: All classified employees, as well as exempt, appointed, and temporary of the Department of Information and Innovation

Issued By: Department of Information and Innovation

Approved By: Thomas Murray, Commissioner and CIO

- I. PURPOSE: This memorandum establishes Department policy and criteria for meritorious awards and promulgates procedures for submission and review of nominations and approval or denial of awards.
- II. POLICY: The Department wishes to encourage and reward in a fair and consistent manner classified and exempt employees for performance which is substantially above and beyond the established standards and norms for the position that enables or promotes the core values of collaboration, communication, competence and teamwork.
- III. GENERAL GUIDELINES: Meritorious awards will be implemented in accordance with this policy, the State Personnel Policies and Procedures, and the Outstanding Performance article of the Agreements between the State of Vermont and the Vermont State Employees Association, Inc.
- IV. MERITORIOUS AWARDS COMMITTEE: There is hereby established a Meritorious Awards Committee. The Meritorious Awards Committee (MAC) will consist of at least six members, including the Chair, each appointed by the Commissioner for two-year terms. For purposes of creating the committee, half of the members will serve for one year initially so that only one half of the committee shall change each year going forward. There is no prohibition from serving multiple terms. The Chair will be a member of Senior Management and will be a non-voting member except to break a tie vote. Not more than three members of the committee will be members of the VSEA, and no more than two members of the same work unit may serve at the same time. The remaining members will be managers. The Department Human Resource Administrator will serve on the Committee as a non-voting member. Regular meetings of the Committee will be held quarterly in the months of August, November, February and May. The Chair may call special meetings at any time. Meetings of the Committee may be held in person or by other means as the Committee may choose. The purpose of the Committee will be to review meritorious award nominations for internal equity and consistency, make recommendations on approval of awards to the Commissioner and to review and modify criteria to be followed in evaluating nominations. Each year the Committee will perform an evaluation of the program and submit, by June 30, a Merit Bonus Log/Report to the Commissioner of the Department of Human Resources. The report may offer recommendations for change to improve equity and consistency. The report may be shared with all employees.
- V. TYPES AND CRITERIA FOR MERITORIOUS AWARDS:
  - (a) Nonrecurring Awards: A Nonrecurring Award is a lump sum or cash equivalent award granted on a one-time basis. It does not alter the employee's current hourly rate of pay. There are two types of Nonrecurring Awards:

1. **Recognition Award:** Recognition Awards are for a range of employee accomplishments and contributions. The distinction between this award and other awards is the length of superior service and the approval process. Recognition awards can be in the form of a gift certificate (\$100) or time off (one day). During the period of time being recognized, the employee's performance evaluation must be satisfactory or higher. This type of reward may be granted without prior review by the committee provided it is first approved by the individual's immediate supervisor and/or manager. An employee is not eligible to receive more than \$200 or 16 hours off in a twelve-month period.
  2. **Bonus:** A Bonus is appropriate for special recognition of exceptional performance on a special project or other short-term (i.e., less than 12 month) activity of major importance to the Department. During the period being recognized, the employee's performance evaluation must be satisfactory or higher. If the award is being granted for job performance rather than a special project, at least one critical job element must have evidence of outstanding performance and performance on all other elements must be at least satisfactory. A Bonus will be in the amount of \$500 payable through the payroll system. An employee is not eligible to receive more than one Bonus in a twelve-month period.
- (b) **Merit Step Increase:** A merit step increase is a permanent adjustment to salary that advances the step level of the employee by one or two steps. A step increase may be warranted when faster than normal salary advancement is appropriate due to sustained long-term (i.e., at least 12 months for one step and 24 months for two steps) performance that significantly exceeds all standards. During the period of service being recognized (the preceding 12 months for a one step increase, and the preceding 24 months for a two step increase), the employee's performance of all job elements must substantially exceed normal job requirements and be considered outstanding. An employee is not eligible to receive more than one step increase in any 12-month period or two step increases in a 24- month period.

- VI. **Nomination and Awards Procedure:** Any department employee may initiate a nomination for an award. An employee may not nominate himself/herself for a meritorious award. An employee nominating another employee for a meritorious award will not discuss the nomination with the nominee unless and until a meritorious award is approved. Nominations shall be submitted to the Department's Human Resource Administrator who shall initiate the review process as described below.

All nominations for a meritorious award shall be consistent with criteria as stated within this policy, shall clearly state the recommended type of award, and shall be well documented. Nominations must be submitted using the attached form. Every nomination must include a narrative that documents the performance which is the basis of the proposed award. All relevant information concerning the nominated employee's job or special project and his/her performance on the same must be included.

- a. The nomination for a Recognition Award shall go to the Human Resource Administrator who will review it for completeness and may return the nomination to obtain further information. The unit manager, or in his or her absence, the Deputy Commissioner shall make the final decision on whether to grant a Recognition Award. The review period should generally not exceed 14 calendar days from the date a complete nomination is forwarded for consideration. An employee receiving a Recognition Award shall be given his or her choice of the

type of award received consistent with this policy. Notice of such rewards shall be forwarded to the Committee for purposes of record keeping and review.

- b. The nomination for a Bonus shall go to the Human Resource Administrator who will review it for completeness and forward it to the individual's immediate supervisor for review and recommendation. The nomination must be forwarded through the chain of command and be sent to the Committee Chair within 21 days of the date of original submission. If the Chair determines more information is needed, he/she may request that information prior to full Committee review. The Chair will determine whether a special meeting to consider the nomination is warranted, otherwise, the committee will take up the completed nomination at their next regularly scheduled meeting. The Meritorious Awards Committee will review every Bonus nomination. The Committee may request additional information. Using the criteria outlined in this Policy, a Bonus must be approved by a majority of the Committee which shall then submit the decision of the Committee to the Commissioner for his or her approval.
- c. The nomination for a Merit Step Increase shall go to the Human Resource Administrator who will review it for completeness and forward it to the individual's immediate supervisor for review and recommendation. The nomination must be forwarded through the chain of command and be sent to the Committee Chair within 21 days of the date of original submission. If the Chair determines more information is needed, he/she may request that information prior to full Committee review. The Chair will determine whether a special meeting to consider the nomination is warranted, otherwise, the committee will take up the completed nomination at their next regularly scheduled meeting. The Meritorious Awards Committee will review every Merit Step Increase nomination. The Committee may request additional information. Using the criteria outlined in this Policy, a Merit Step Increase must be approved by a majority of the Committee which shall then submit the decision of the Committee to the Commissioner for his or her approval. A Merit Step Increase must also be submitted to the Commissioner of the Department of Human Resources for approval prior to being awarded.

Notification Process - Notification of an award shall first go to the employee's unit Manager. After the employee is notified, a general announcement of the award will be made to the rest of the department. If a nomination is not approved, no announcement of the decision will be made. The Human Resource Administrator will complete all paperwork necessary to implement meritorious awards.

- VII. Award Criteria - These criteria shall be used in evaluating employee nominations. In most cases, any one of these behaviors may warrant a Recognition Award. Nominees for bonuses and merit increases will, most likely, exhibit a number of the behaviors.
  - a. Collaboration
    - 1) Makes service improvement suggestions
    - 2) Brings in new information, techniques or materials to support and encourage fresh thinking
    - 3) Takes initiative and calculated risks to try new things
    - 4) Builds enthusiasm and optimism among co-workers to expand their belief in what's possible
    - 5) Encourages individuals to volunteer and get involved in projects that are of special interest in spite of job description
    - 6) Helps others think things through and get "unstuck" so they can act within constraints

b. Communication

- 1) Demonstrates quality public communication
- 2) Increase positive visibility with our customers; promotes mission of the department
- 3) Resolves conflicts through constructive confrontation
- 4) Provides service perceived as quality by both external and internal customers
- 5) Is pro-active rather than reactive
- 6) Writes and prepares documentation that is clear, concise and accurate

c. Competence

- 1) Demonstrates problem solving skills
- 2) Participates in job skill training
- 3) Streamlines tasks
- 4) Eliminates waste or duplication
- 5) Ends unproductive tasks
- 6) Manages work time so as to focus on priority tasks
- 7) Delegates without jeopardizing quality or control

d. Team Work

- 1) Displays a positive attitude toward tasks, public, and co-workers
- 2) Uses humor constructively to keep self and co-workers energized
- 3) Confronts or minimizes negative attitudes and complaints raised by co-workers so a positive climate prevails
- 4) Acts in a manner which results in other workers having a better attitude and working more productively
- 5) Places the needs of the team above his or her individual needs or motivations